

Grano, Simona A.: *Environmental Governance in Taiwan: A New Generation of Activists and Stakeholders*. London: Routledge, 2015, 206 pp., ISBN 9-781-1388-3140-7

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DOI 10.1515/asia-2016-0036

On January 16 2016, Tsai I-wen of Democratic Progressive Party won a landslide in Taiwan's presidential election and captured the parliamentary majority for the first time for her independence-leaning party. Taiwan's third peaceful power turnover signaled a decisive defeat of the Kuomintang, whose eight-year tenure generated widespread dissatisfaction particularly over the more intimate economic and political tie with China. While most international observers focused on the Taiwan-China relationship, which certainly had a profound bearing on the regional security, less attention had been paid to the genesis of domestic discontents and how they produced political reverberations. Published half year before the historical change, Simona A. Grano's new book on environmentalism provided a precious ground-level survey on how these civil-society activities proceeded in these critical years.

Grano, a Zurich-based Italian sinologist, conducted a 12-month field research in 2011 and the result was a fascinating and in-depth book on Taiwan's environmental politics. An academic monograph with such rich details and insightful analysis was even uncommon in Chinese language. As such, the author made a valuable contribution by presenting Taiwan's struggles with the imperative of sustainability before a broader readership. As rightly pointed out by the author, Taiwan's experience has wider implications internationally. It demonstrates the painful adjustments of how a successfully industrialized economy undergoes the transition toward a less exploitative and less predatory developmental course. Moreover, it shows the reasons why a new democracy necessarily encourages its citizens to raise higher expectation on environmental quality. Consequently Taiwan's story is of direct relevance to the late developers (such as the so-called newly-industrialized countries or emerging markets) and the recently democratized countries after the third wave. In addition, being a Chinese society, Taiwan constitutes an approximate reference case to predict the future of China, the world's second largest economy which now simultaneously encounters the triple challenges of maintaining economic growth, coping with the political crisis of democratic deficit, and assuaging citizens' complaint about the worsened environment.

The centerpiece of *Environmental Governance in Taiwan* is made up of four case studies on contemporary environmental protests, the anti-nuclear movement (1988–now), the anti-Kuokuang Petrochemical Naphtha Cracker movement (2005–2011), the anti-Taipei Dome movement (2008–now), and anti-Tamsui North Shore Road movement (1998–now). The judicious case selection presents the rich diversity of the current environmental concerns in Taiwan. Citizens galvanized into organized resistance not only because of the perceived risks in industrial pollution and radioactive contamination but also for the reasons of ecological balance, cultural heritage preservation, a less congested living space, and social justice. It is precisely due to its inclusiveness that environmental politics has become so central to the post-industrial societies, just as class struggle used to play a dominant role during the industrializing era. It also explains why Taiwan's contemporary environmentalism attracts widely diversified participants. That potential victims, such as the residents in the vicinity of the locally unwanted land uses, join the opposition should not be a surprise. However, the presence of community activists, literary writers, academic professionals, and student activists in these collective actions are rather the unusual feature that testifies to the broader appeal of modern environmentalism.

In fact, it is exactly this “new generation of activists and stakeholders” (this book's subtitle) that the author pays particular attention to. Previously Taiwan's environmentalists had leaned on the political alliance with the Democratic Progressive Party, the successor of democratic movement since the late 1970s, in order to achieve their desired policy reforms. Learning from the painful lessons of how unreliable a party ally could be, particularly when the Democratic Progressive Party was in power in 2000–2008, Taiwan's environmental activists decided to embark on a novel and more politically independent course. They produced documentaries to communicate the environmental plight, demonstrated scientific evidence to persuade the public, utilized every institutional avenues to delay the harmful developmental projects (the so-called “rules-based participatory approaches”), filed legal challenges to the executive decision, employed the rather chic tactics of cultural jamming, and, if necessary, mounted disruptive acts of civil disobedience. And their achievements are rather impressive. The recently largest investment project (Kuokuang) was aborted, and the controversial forth nuclear power plant was stopped by an avowedly pro-nuclear Kuomintang government. Although the cases of urban renewal (Taipei Dome) and road construction (Tamsui North Shore Road) seem to generate less directly negative impact and community resistance, the opponents succeeded in challenging their legality in court so that these two projects remained halted at the time of writing.

Despite these “victories”, a careful reading of Grano’s book also shows the very limitation of Taiwan’s environmentalism. Legal technicalities are far too distant from the everyday world of average citizen so that an institutionally-oriented environmentalism is bound to lose its grassroots appeal. Tree-hugging might demonstrate core activists’ commitment to ecological concerns, but it remains outlandish in the local context. Taiwan’s Green Party was established in 1996 – a pioneer in East Asia. Nevertheless, it remains a marginal and unsuccessful player in the electoral politics to the extent that a great majority of electorates continue to mistake it for the Democratic Progressive Party since these two parties share the same color symbol.

These are the valuable lessons one can learn from *Environmental Governance in Taiwan*, and I trust that the author has analyzed the four cases as thoroughly as she can. There remain some suggestions for improvement. First, being fluent in Mandarin Chinese, the author might as well reduce the amount of references to the existing works, including the present reviewer, since there are already distinctive findings and contributions on their own. Secondly, there seems to be a more appropriate alternative to frame the theoretical questions. This book is less much about environmental governance, but rather about environmental activism. The author invites the readers to experience Taiwanese environmental activists’ struggles in a plethora of decision-making arenas and institutions, which turn out to be mutually conflicting. A normal democracy is necessarily characterized by vertical (central-to-local) and horizontal (judiciary versus executive branches, local-to-local) divisions of power or even departmental rivalries, which provide multiple entry points for environmentalists to deploy various tactics. That many environmental regulations remain only in paper also seems a universal feature. For instance, environmental impact assessment is globally mired in controversy in spite of its original intent to transcend politics by scientific professionalism.

Lastly, there is an ostensible lack of a central guiding puzzle that undergirds the whole investigation. It seems that the book stops at posing a more challenging question on the particularities of Taiwan’s environmentalism. There are certainly many ways of raising a more ambitious question. One of my personal favorites is why Taiwan’s understaffed and poorly-financed environmental NGOs can generate so much political impacts. For example, both Japan and South Korea possess much stronger environmental NGOs without being able to successfully challenge the official pro-nuclear policy even after the Fukushima Incident. Is it because of the rise of post-materialist values or the weakness of the ruling coalition? If weak organizational basis can generate powerful political impacts, the question should be ore directly addressed to the issue of movement efficacy.

In short, this book will remain a trusted source and a standard reference for the future investigations on Taiwan's environmentalism. I sincerely congratulate on the author's effort and hope that she can further observe the evolution of Taiwan's environmental politics, particularly since a new political era has dawned with the recent election result.